

Penguin



Readers

George Eliot

The
Mill
on the
Floss



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Penguin Readers edition of *The Mill on the Floss* published by Penguin Books Ltd, 2023
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Text for Penguin Readers edition adapted by Hannah Dolan
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Illustrated by Tania Rex
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Cover image copyright © Dmitry Lobov/Shutterstock
Design project management by Dynamo Limited

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-241-58904-5

All correspondence to:
Penguin Books
Penguin Random House Children's
One Embassy Gardens, 8 Vauxhall Gardens,
London SW11 7BW



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Note about the story

George Eliot (1819–1880) was an English writer. Her real name was Mary Ann Evans. She wrote her books in a man's name because, at the time when she was writing, many people thought that books written by women were not as intelligent or interesting as ones written by men.

The Mill on the Floss was written in 1860. It is about a brother and sister called Tom and Maggie Tulliver, who live in a mill on the River Floss near a village called St Ogg's in Lincolnshire, England. They go through some difficult times in their lives together, and they often see life and love in very different ways.

In the story, Tom and Maggie's mother, Bessy Tulliver, calls her husband "Mr Tulliver" instead of "Edward" because married women were "owned" by their husbands. They did not make their own money and they treated their husbands as the most important people in their lives.

Before-reading questions

- 1 Read the back cover of the book. What do you think will happen in the story?
- 2 Read the "Note about the story". In England in the 19th century, girls were educated differently from boys. Did the same thing happen in your country at that time?
- 3 Tom and Maggie Tulliver are brother and sister. Do you have brothers or sisters? How have you and your brothers or sisters changed from when you were children to now?

CHAPTER ONE A school for Tom

One cold, wet February afternoon, Mr and Mrs Tulliver were talking **beside*** a bright fire at Dorlcote Mill. The mill was on the beautiful green banks of the River Floss, which ran down to the village of St Ogg's.

"I want Tom to be well **educated**. He needs a good **education**!" Mr Tulliver was saying. "That's why I'm taking him out of his school. His two years there have been fine, but I don't want him to be a farmer or a **mill**er like me. I want Tom to be cleverer than me. I want him to talk and write nicely. I want him to help me with these **lawsuits**. I don't want him to be a **lawyer** – no, not one of those **rascals**! But I want him to be in a business where he can make a lot of money."

Mr Tulliver was talking to his wife – a pretty blonde woman of nearly 40 years.

"You know best, Mr Tulliver," she said, "but shall I kill a couple of chickens and invite the aunts and uncles here to talk about it? I want to see what they think."

"You can kill as many chickens as you like, Bessy, but I shall ask neither aunt nor uncle what to do with my own son! I don't care what they think," said Mr Tulliver.

"**Dear me**, Mr Tulliver!" said Mrs Tulliver. "How can you talk like that? My children are lucky to have their aunts and

*Definitions of words in **bold** can be found in the glossary on pages 78–80.

uncles around them. If Tom is going to a new school, I'd like it to be one where I can take his clothes and wash them at home."

"We might not find a school near enough for that," said Mr Tulliver. "And, if we don't, I don't want you to **complain** about sending Tom there. I know you, Bessy – you find the smallest problems and then you can't see past them. You didn't want me to use a good carriage driver because he had a strange face!"

"Dear me!" cried Mrs Tulliver again, in **surprise**. "I have never complained about a carriage driver with a strange face!"

"Never mind, Bessy," said Mr Tulliver. "Talking like this can be **confusing** work. I just mean that it is a difficult thing to know which school to pick."

Mr Tulliver was quiet for a moment, then he said, "I know what I'll do – I'll talk to Mr Riley about it. He's coming here tomorrow to talk about the lawsuit."

"I've got the best bed ready for him, Mr Tulliver," said Mrs Tulliver.

But Mr Tulliver was not listening. He was looking closely at his thick socks, thinking about Tom's school and the lawsuit. The lawsuit was against a man called Mr Pivart who lived up the river from the mill. He was taking water from the river to use on his farm. This changed the way that the mill was working and Mr Tulliver was not happy about it.

"Yes, I think that's the right thing to do, Bessy," he continued. "Riley is the sort of man who will know a good school. I shall have time to ask him tomorrow night, after

we've talked about the lawsuit. I want Tom to be a man like Riley. He knows a lot of big words that don't mean much to me, and he knows about business, too. But something I'm afraid of, Bessy, is that Tom hasn't got the right brain for business. He can be a little slow. He got his brain from your side of the family."

"Yes, you're right there, Mr Tulliver," agreed Mrs Tulliver.

"It's a difficult thing that our boy is like his mother's side of the family and our girl is like mine," said Mr Tulliver. "Maggie is twice as clever as Tom. Too clever for a woman!"

"She is!" said Mrs Tulliver. "I don't know where she is now and it's almost dinner time." She turned and looked outside the window. "Ah, there she is, playing up and down beside the water like a wild thing. She'll fall in there one day."

Mrs Tulliver got up from her chair and knocked loudly on the window. She shook her head and waved at Maggie before sitting back down. "I don't know why her hair looks so untidy," she said.

"Cut it off! Cut it short," cried Mr Tulliver, quickly.

"How can you talk like that, Mr Tulliver? She's nine years old! She can't have her hair short," said Mrs Tulliver, as the small girl entered the room.

Maggie took off her hat and dark and heavy hair fell around her face. She threw her head back to get her hair out of her black eyes.

"Dear me, Maggie," cried Mrs Tulliver. "Don't throw your hat down there! Take it upstairs. Then **tidy** your hair and change your clothes!"



After dinner the next evening, Mr Tulliver found the right moment to ask Mr Riley his important question.

“There’s an idea that I have in my head,” began Mr Tulliver, in a low voice. “It’s about my boy, Tom.”

At the sound of her brother’s name, Maggie, who was sitting by the fire with a large book open in front of her, shook her heavy hair back from her ears. Not many things could stop Maggie from reading a book, but, when she heard Tom’s name, she always listened very hard.

Mr Tulliver explained that he wanted to put Tom in a new school and he wanted Mr Riley’s advice on where that might be.

“You see, I don’t want him to be a miller or a farmer,” Mr Tulliver said. “I shall give him an education and find a different business for him, so he doesn’t push me out of mine.”

When she heard this, Maggie jumped from her chair. She forgot all about her heavy book, which landed loudly by the fire. She went to her father’s knees and cried, “Father, Tom is not like that!”

Mr Tulliver laughed and looked at Maggie warmly. “She understands everything, this girl.”

Mr Riley picked up Maggie’s book and looked through the pages.

“Can you tell me something about this book?” he said to Maggie. “What’s this picture?”

“It’s a horrible picture, isn’t it? But I just have to look at it. That woman in the water is a witch,” Maggie said.

Mr Tulliver listened happily while his little girl told Mr Riley the story of the witch.

After a while, Mr Riley said, “That’s *The History of the Devil* by Daniel Defoe. That’s not the right book for a little girl! Have you not got any prettier books?”

“Oh, yes!” said Maggie. “But I like looking at the pictures in this one and making stories about them in my head.”

Mr Tulliver started to feel uncomfortable. “Shut the book now, Maggie.”

Maggie closed it and went into a dark corner behind her father’s chair while the two men talked about Tom’s new school. Mr Riley gave Mr Tulliver the name of a well-educated **tutor** named Mr Stelling.

“Father,” said Maggie, who was suddenly at her father’s arm again. “Is Tom’s new school very **far** away?”

“I don’t know, my girl,” said Mr Tulliver, kindly. “Ask Mr Riley – he knows.”

Maggie came round quickly to Mr Riley and said, “How far is it, please, sir?”

“It’s a long way away. Too far for you,” said Mr Riley, who did not want to talk to a naughty child.

“You’re wrong!” cried Maggie. She began to hate Mr Riley. He seemed to think that she was stupid and not good enough to talk to.

“Sit down and be quiet, Maggie!” said her mother, coming into the room. “But is the school too far for me to send Tom’s washed clothes to, Mr Riley?”

“It’s only about fifteen miles away,” said Mr Riley.

“That’s too far!” cried Mrs Tulliver.

CHAPTER TWO

Tom comes home

“There he is, my sweet boy!” cried Mrs Tulliver. “Home from school!”

Mrs Tulliver stood with her arms open, while Maggie jumped from one leg to the other. Tom walked quietly towards his mother **and** sister. Showing no strong feelings towards them, he said, “Hello,” then asked where the dog, Yap, was.

Tom enjoyed their many kisses, but Maggie hung on to his neck for a bit too long. His blue eyes looked out at the fields, towards the sheep and the river bank. He was excited to **fish** there the next morning.

Tom and Maggie warmed up beside the fire while their mother got out Tom’s clothes for washing.

“You don’t know what I’ve got in *my* pockets,” said Tom to Maggie.

“What is it?” asked Maggie. “I can see nothing but a bit of yellow.”

“You have to guess, Maggie!” said Tom.

“I can’t, Tom! I hate guessing,” said Maggie, holding on to his arm. “*Please* be kind to me, Tom. Don’t ask me to guess!”

Tom slowly pulled out the things in his pocket. “It’s two new fishing lines, Maggie – one of them is for you,” he said. “I saved the money to buy you one. Let’s fish with them down at the river tomorrow. You shall put worms on the line and catch your own fish! Won’t it be fun?”